



Discussion Guide Excerpts

This is a resource for teachers, faculty and trainers who seek to build soft skills through their integration within academic and career courses and other learning activities.

The excerpts below are taken from Learning Resources, Inc. (LRI's) Comprehensive Discussion Guide. It is designed to be used by workforce professionals, teachers and trainers to enable them to integrate soft skill discussion into academic or career courses, create or enhance workshops and support other opportunities to develop people's soft skills effectiveness.

LRI recognizes that soft skills are developed or remediated most effectively when individuals' strengths and developmental needs are identified through pre-assessment, then developed through various interventions over time and, finally, when attainment is documented through post-assessment.

The Comprehensive Discussion Guide is available to LRI's customers at no cost.

Situation to discuss that addresses the Skills (and competencies/tasks) measured by LRI's Workforce Readiness Skill program (WRS).

SKILL: Integrity – You know right from wrong and try to do the right thing.

QUESTION: Assume you are at work and one of your co-workers decides that he wants to leave work 15 minutes early, but does not want the manager to whom you both report to know that he is leaving early. As your co-worker is leaving he explains to you that he is leaving early and asks you to “cover for him” in case your manager comes by and asks where he is. What would you do in this situation?

(Possible probes/additional comments: Assume the Manager comes by and asks you directly where your co-worker is. What would you say? What would you say to the coworker before he leaves?)

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Indicating disagreement with the co-worker's deceitful actions.
2. Informing the co-worker he/she will not lie to the manager.
3. Indicating that he/she will tell the manager the true story.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Seeing nothing wrong with the co-worker's behavior (e.g., it's not my business).
2. Agreeing to “cover” for the co-worker or play dumb if questioned by the manager.
3. Indicating disagreement with the co-worker's actions, but reluctant to state views to the co-worker.

SKILL: Responsibility – You work hard to do your job the best that it can be done; you pay attention to details and concentrate even when doing things you don't like. You try to be on-time for work and work with a positive attitude.

QUESTION: Assume that you work in a large Department Store and that your manager just told you to take your morning break. Your break is only fifteen minutes long and you need to be back at your work station in exactly fifteen minutes. You are on your way to the break room when a customer approaches you and asks you where she can find picture frames. You know that picture frames are on the opposite side of the store, in the Home Furnishing section, and they are somewhat difficult to find. How would you deal with this customer?

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Cutting the break short and walking the customer over to the location of the picture frames.
2. Attempting to locate a co-worker who can take the customer to the picture frames.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Telling the customer you are "on break" and cannot help them right now.
2. Simply telling the customer that picture frames are located in the Home Furnishing section of the store and providing no more direction or suggestions.

SKILL: Self-Esteem – You handle feedback and suggestions without becoming defensive, angry or upset. You are not afraid to learn new things.

QUESTION: Assume that you work in a store where you are required to clock into work using a time card. You arrive at work and are on your way to clock in when a customer approaches you and asks for help. After helping the customer for about five minutes, you then go to the time clock to clock into work. Your manager notices that you are a few minutes late clocking into work and politely reminds you that it is important that you get to work on time. How would you deal with your manager?

IF the participant would explain that he/she was late clocking in only due to the fact that a customer was being helped, follow up your question with the following: Okay, then suppose that your manager says that helping the customer was good, but that in the future you need to clock-in before you perform any work activities. What would you then say or do?

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Initially explaining why he/she was late clocking in (as opposed to disagreeing that he/she was “late” or simply agreeing with the manager).
2. Seeking additional clarity regarding why clocking in before performing any work activities is important.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Indicating an overly aggressive need to “correct” the manager’s perception that he/she was “late”.
2. Simply agreeing with the manager’s initial comments and not explaining the situation (e.g., “whatever”, etc.).
3. Asking no questions regarding why clocking in first is important.

SKILL: Self-Management – You are aware of what you can and cannot do and you are not afraid to ask for help when you need it; you try to get better at things that you do not do well.

QUESTION: Assume that you work in a company that does commercial printing. Your supervisor asks you to show a new employee how to operate the large hole-punch machine in the shop. You know a little about the hole-punch machine from having seen other employees operate it a few times, but you have never actually operated it yourself. How would you handle the situation with your supervisor?

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Candidly informing the supervisor of your own lack of knowledge and experience with the equipment.
2. Asking the supervisor to be trained on the equipment at the same time as the new employee.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Accepting the assignment and attempting to simply do “the best you can”.
2. Simply suggesting the supervisor have someone else do the training activity, since he/she is not very familiar with the equipment.

SKILL: Sociability – You are understanding, friendly, flexible and polite when you are around co-workers and/or others. You participate in what is going on instead of trying to be invisible. You get along with others and you take an interest in what others say and do.

QUESTION: Assume that one of your co-workers, with whom you are somewhat friendly, is currently undergoing a divorce and often wants to talk with you about personal problems he is having because of the divorce. However, the supervisor that both you and the co-worker report to has told you that he (the supervisor) believes you and the co-worker have tended to spend too much time talking and need to pay more attention to your work. How would you deal with your co-worker?

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Indicating an awareness and potential willingness to use non-work time (i.e., breaks, lunch time, after work hours, etc.) for such discussions.
2. Recognizing the need to inform the co-worker in a sensitive manner of the need to decrease personal conversation time.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Overreacting – i.e., telling the co-worker “I can’ t talk to you any more”, etc.
2. Dealing with the co-worker in an insensitive manner – i.e., your problems are getting me in trouble, etc.
3. Suggesting the supervisor talk to the co-worker directly about the problem – i.e., it’s the co-worker, not me that always wants to talk, etc.

SKILL: Decision Making – You make sound decisions when carrying out company policies and guidelines, develop solutions for customer problems, recognize the limits of your authority and know when a customer problem should be referred to others.

QUESTION: Assume you are working and a customer comes to you and wants to return a product she purchased three months ago from your store. You know that your store's policy is that all returns must be made within 30 days of purchase unless the product is defective. In situations where the product was purchased more than 30 days ago, but is being returned because it is defective, only a supervisor can approve the return. What would you do and say to this customer?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: (If the participant says that he/she would ask the customer why he was unhappy with the product, ask the following question.) Suppose the customer says he wants the refund because he just hasn't had as much use for the product as he thought he would. What would you do?

NOTES: _____

SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Questioning the customer to determine the reason for wanting to return the product.
2. Attempting to handle the problem without involving the supervisor – the situation is unambiguous.
3. Recognizing that accepting the return would be inappropriate.
4. Apologizing for any inconvenience caused to the customer.

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS:

1. Explaining the return policy to the customer prior to asking why the customer wants to return the product or not asking why the customer wants to return the product.
2. Explaining that only a supervisor can approve the return or deferring the matter to a supervisor without attempting to first handle the situation himself/herself.
3. Simply telling the customer "no" or "it's against policy" without explaining the policy.